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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1694
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 4428
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO PRIORITY 4682
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 9788
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 2669
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4082
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9821
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0932
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 1165
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KATHMANDU 001405

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/02/2016

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SUBJECT: MAOISTS MOBILIZE NEARLY HALF A MILLION FOR MASS MEETING

REF: KATHMANDU 1391

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The Maoists mobilized an estimated four-to-five hundred thousand people to participate in a peaceful, well-organized rally in Kathmandu on June 2. Emboffs estimated that Maoists bused in most attendees from outlying districts to participate in their first public rally in the capital. The Maoists commandeered over one thousand vehicles to transfer participants to the rally. Security forces were keeping a low profile, and told Emboff that they had not seen anyone violate the code of conduct by wearing combat dress or carrying weapons. End Summary.

Massive Peaceful Rally

¶2. (C) On June 2, the Maoists mobilized an estimated four-to-five hundred thousand people to participate in the insurgents' first public rally in Kathmandu. Emboffs observed the entire rally, which was peaceful and very well organized. Emboffs noted that the area surrounding the rally was extraordinarily crowded. (Note: June 2 was a local Nepali holiday so many schools and businesses were closed, allowing more people to attend the rally. End note.) Police on June 2 told Emboff that Maoist leader Agni Sapkota was the senior Maoist leader present at the rally.

¶3. (C) Senior Maoist leaders addressed the gathering with long-winded harangues interspersed with song and dance programs. The Maoists have been organizing similar events outside the capital for the last few weeks after the government reciprocated their three-month-long cease-fire and began peace talks. According to the May 25 Code of Conduct, the Maoists can organize peaceful rallies as long as they do not wear combat dress or carry arms. Maoist speakers warned against "foreign interference" and the "imperialist U.S." Some made allegations that foreigners were trying to reinstate the King. The crowd dutifully applauded when speakers criticized the King or when "peace" was mentioned. The Maoists covered the rally on their mobile FM radio

station which was not operating from inside the Kathmandu Valley.

Most Attendees from Outside Valley

¶4. (C) Emboffs observed over 100 empty buses parked along one stretch of the Ring Road where demonstrators initially congregated. We estimate that over eighty-five percent of the attendees came from outside the Kathmandu Valley to attend the rally. Rallies began at 1100 local time at various parts of the city and converged at the Ratna Park open theater in the middle of the city. Speeches began at ¶1300. Emboffs noted that participants were men and women, old and young, the well-dressed and those in rags. While walking to Ratna Park demonstrators were chanting pro-Maoist and anti-monarchy slogans. The rally itself, however, was more like "a boring picnic" and lacked a sense of pro-Maoist sentiment. Emboffs described the rally area as "a sea of red" as protesters waved red Maoist flags, but by 1500 local time some people had begun to depart. The weather was overcast, and some light rain fell during the day.

Well Organized

¶5. (U) The Maoists had announced that they would have over five thousand volunteers to help organize the rally and man water stands and emergency health posts. Emboffs observed several of the volunteers on June 2, as they were easily identifiable in white T-shirts with pictures of Maoist leader Prachanda on the front and the word "volunteer" on the back. Media reported that the Maoists had set up 175 broadcast speakers, 50 first aid posts, and over two-dozen bus parking areas.

Maoists Commandeered Vehicles to Transport People

¶6. (C) Traffic inside the Ring Road in Kathmandu came to a virtual halt on June 2 as Maoists poured into the city to attend the mass rally. Media reported that Maoists took control of 450 vehicles in Chitwan District, 80 in Gorkha District, 70 from Rupandehi District, 70 from Sindhupalchowk District, and 200 vehicles from Ramechhap District to ferry their cadre and people to attend the mass meeting. Residents in rural regions of neighboring districts said Maoists had issued notices in the villages that a member from each family must go to the capital to participate in the meeting. Meanwhile, people in Kathmandu reported that Maoists had asked schools and guest houses to host participants. One political party contact complained that the Maoists had asked to billet cadre at his house. Although his wife had refused, a group of Maoists insisted on preparing food in the back of his house.

Security Forces Taking Hands-Off Approach

¶7. (C) Emboffs observed security forces mobilized around the Royal Palace, but security was not present in large numbers in other parts of the city. The police were in riot gear and did not have guns. Police told Emboff that they had not arrested anyone and that they had not seen anyone in combat uniform or with weapons.

Comment

¶8. (C) Despite overcast weather, the Maoists appeared to have met their goal of mobilizing half a million people and keeping the demonstration peaceful. While an impressive show of strength, the lack of enthusiasm and the fact that most participants obviously did not come of their own free will were also noteworthy.

MORIARTY